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Windscape roars with vibrancy

By Mary Jane Leach, March 16, 2014

“Special mention should be given to the arrangements created by the members of the group. These aren't just bland arrangements written so a group can have more material. These arrangements were written by people who know the instruments inside and out, and demand virtuosic playing from everyone, coaxing out every possible timbre the instruments can make and taking them into registers other groups may fear to enter.”

There is something about a woodwinds concert lately that has audience members clapping for more and leaving with smiles. Such was the case Friday night when Friends of Chamber Music presented "The Roaring '20s Revisited" by the quintet Windscape, which played to a full house at Emma Willard School.

The concert got off to a rousing New Orleans-style start with the group marching onto the stage playing Louis Armstrong's "Yes, I'm in the Barrel." And, yes, we were all in their sway from that moment on. David Jolley (French horn) made the arrangement, which showcased every instrument to great effect.

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It's refreshing to go to a chamber music concert and have it not be YASQ (Yet Another String Quartet). While string quartets have a uniformity in sound, there is a hierarchy, which wind quintets don't have. Even the bassoon, with its lower register, is treated melodically as an equal, and what you start noticing is the colors of the instruments, and how the repetition of a melodic phrase by another instrument becomes more than a repetition, but, with its different color, transformed. And when you start doubling the melody, the pairs of instruments create wonderful new sounds.

The Roaring '20s theme of the concert showcased music that had the vibrancy and hopefulness from that era. Jolley again made an expert arrangement, of Igor Stravinsky's "Ragtime," so that you didn't

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even miss the other six instruments it was originally written for Alan R. Kay (clarinet) arranged excerpts from Kurt Weill's "Threepenny Opera," and it had some delicious doublings.

Frank Morelli (bassoon) arranged "Three Brazilian Choros" by Ernesto Nazareth and Zequinha de Abreu, which had the vibrancy of the street and resembled a concert ragtime piece. Continuing in Brazil, the group played Heitor Villa-Lobos' "Quintette (en forme de Choros)," which explored some interesting timbres and ended on sustained overblown tones that tingled the ears.

Music from George Gershwin ended the night, with "Three Virtuoso Etudes" arranged by Jolley, and an encore of "Prelude 1" arranged by William Hoyt. Not to be forgotten are Tara Helen O'Connor (flutes) and Randall Ellis (oboe). There is no star in this group, as they are all stars of equal strengths.

As Oliver Twist said, "Please, sir, I want some more."

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